

EDITORIAL

A new word has entered the lexicon of ufology. It is 'pelicanist'. A pelicanist is, apparently, a ufologist who persists in seeking rational explanations for puzzling UFO reports rather than classifying them as manifestations of alien spacecraft. The word was coined during an Internet debate about the Arnold sighting of 1947, when someone suggested that Arnold might have been deceived by a distant view of a flock of pelicans. Maybe this is not the true solution to this classic case, but the mere suggestion of a rational explanation infuriated the ETHers and a new label was conferred on UFO sceptics and proponents of the psychosocial hypothesis. As for *Magonia* and its editors, we are proud to be pelicanists.

RIDICULE AND UFOLOGY

John Rimmer

What is it that makes someone a sceptical ufologist? Could it be that after becoming interested in the subject through reading popular books and magazines, then studying more detailed reports, serious books and specialist journals, they then decide that the evidence they have uncovered is not enough to justify the belief that UFOs have an extraterrestrial origin? And there are certainly some sceptics who have already made up their minds before studying the topic in any depth. They may have a rigid and dogmatic view of science, and look only at evidence which confirms their existing viewpoint.

But now we learn that there is another type of sceptic. These are people who are sceptics because they are frightened. Frightened of what? Well, in a long Internet discussion recently on the UFO UpDates (www.ufomind.com/ufo/updates) Jerome Clark has declared that such people are frightened of ridicule. Apparently some UFO sceptics become so upset if people criticise them that they adopt - perhaps subconsciously, Clark suggests - a sceptical attitude that signals to those in the know: 'Hey guys, we really don't believe this stuff, we're just like you scientific types'.

When this remarkable discovery was posted on UpDates I replied that, yes, some people may trim their ufological views so as not to offend others, but that probably this was confined to people in academic positions who didn't want to prejudice their jobs or funding. John Mack is someone who has been in this position, although no one could accuse him of adopting a policy of ridicule avoidance during his dispute with Harvard University. However, I couldn't see that this would apply to your normal, common-or-garden amateur ufologist.

Clark would have none of this: 'You seem, absurdly, to have reduced us all to the sum of our financial interests!' He continues: 'Look to your soul my friend. *Magonia* and the larger PSH (Psycho-Social Hypothesis) crowd of which it is a part are always going on and on about unconscious motivations of which witnesses and non-PSH theorists are unaware but which nonetheless, according to you guys, drive them to certain experiences, actions and behaviors'.

Warning to the theme he claims that UFO sceptics and *Magonia* types 'go bonkers' if anyone suggests that they also might have their own unconscious motivations. Now I don't know about my own unconscious motivations - well I wouldn't do, would I, because they're unconscious - but looking around at the sceptical ufologists I know personally, people like Peter Rogerson and Andy Roberts, I don't notice any great fear of ridicule. A point I made to Clark, which I have had no comeback to, is that if we were afraid of ridicule, we wouldn't be in ufology in the first place. What ridicule there is starts at the moment you profess an interest in UFOs. Most people outside the field are unaware of the distinctions between ETHers, New Ufologists, Sceptics, Skeptics, Paraufologists, Military Ufologists

or whatever. Moving from one group to another is far too subtle to ward off any ridicule from the laity.

I'm reminded of the old political joke:

'You can't come into the country, you're a communist.'

'But I'm an anti-communist!'

'I don't care what sort of communist you are, you still can't come in.'

Clark is concerned that by adopting a 'pelicanist' position (new word for sceptic - too complicated to explain here) *Magonia* has 'effectively ensured that you are not one of those iconoclastic ufologists who question the conventional wisdom on the matter, and thereby have immunised yourselves from ridicule'.

So we must assume that according to Clark the people who are 'iconoclastic' and challenge conventional wisdom are the ufologists who promote the ETH, or at least some form of hitherto unknown actual physical phenomenon. But is this so? One person following the Internet exchange wrote to me directly rather than to the mailing list, challenging this assumption. He wrote:

'I would also like to add that the argument could be made that someone who suggests a relation between incubi/succubi attacks and alien abductions, or sleep paralysis and alien abductions, or other dimensional visitations vs hardware in the sky, or spiritual/demonic phenomena, or for that matter attempts to relate the UFO phenomena to the paradigm emerging from quantum physics, is just as likely, if not more likely, to experience raised eyebrows or hostility, as someone suggesting visitors from Alpha Centauri, to a population that believes in UFOs.'

Clark's response to this, apart from a snide comment about a mis-spelling, was that it shows that *anyone* who suggests a non-conventional explanation for UFOs is liable to ridicule. So as the topics mentioned by my correspondent cover most of the issues raised by PSH ufologists, presumably they also are liable to ridicule, so there is no particular advantage in being an ETH ufologist if you want to avoid ridicule. Which is of course what I said in the first place.

Like all Internet debates a great deal of other relevant and totally irrelevant material was thrown in including a historical sidetrack on the fine town of Canby, Minnesota, and the delightful neighbourhood of John Dee Cottage. A more relevant contribution from Jenny Randles pointed out that the opinions of friends and co-researchers were liable to influence an individual's opinion more than some sort of vague 'establishment' viewpoint. I agree. I can well imagine walking into The Moon on the Square in Feltham one Tuesday evening and announcing to John Harney that I was going to write a piece for *Magonia* on UFO propulsion systems - the uneasy silence, the moving to the far end of the table and the sudden interest in the framed local history photographs of old Feltham - and I probably *would* feel the icy blast of ridicule.

There certainly is ridicule heaped on the UFO subject. Probably the people who suffer from it most are the UFO percipients themselves, and perhaps some of the ridiculous ideas put about by some researchers only adds to this. But are UFO researchers themselves influenced by this? I doubt it. The Internet debate threw up no evidence of it despite dark talk of it influencing us on an unconscious level, and my only advice to ufologists who fear it - ETHers, 'Pelicanists', Sceptics - is if you can't stand the ridicule get out of the kitchen.

DOGFIGHT WITH UFO - IN 1915

Nigel Watson

Old newspaper files contain literally thousands of accounts of sightings of strange aerial phenomena. Searching through dusty volumes or viewing microfilms can be boring and tedious work but it is very rewarding to suddenly rediscover such cases. The files for the World War One period certainly contain many treasures for ufologists.

One very unusual case from the USA illustrates my point: it began with a simple sighting of an aeroplane by thousands of people going to work in Buffalo. It streaked across the sky at 8 a.m. on the morning of 19 February 1915. The outline of the craft was plainly visible and it caused great excitement.

At the time there was considerable anti-German sentiment, and in isolation it could be put down to what they used to call 'war nerves'. The revelations of Lieutenant E.H. Bequer, of the British Royal Flying Corps, put the case head-and-shoulders above any similar examples. He was in charge of the chaotic process of loading horses at the East Buffalo stockyards, when he took time out of his task to claim that:

'... he was in the machine which sailed over Buffalo three months ago. He called attention to a recently healed bullet wound, claiming a ball had gone through the calf and slightly splintered the bone. Another flesh wound scar in the abdomen showed, he said, where another bullet had hit.

'According to Bequer, he started the flight which carried him over Buffalo from a transport about 20 miles off Long Island. He landed only once in the United States, a couple of hundred miles from New York City because of engine trouble. Passing here, he said, he was about 3,000 feet up.

'The trip across the continent after leaving Buffalo, he said was continually over Canadian territory. It took only four days and he did not consider that anything remarkable for the powerful army machine. Desire for absolute secrecy in the preparation to check the aeroplane plot unearthed by the secret service at Vancouver, he said, was responsible for the flight.'

It is true that an aeroplane was seen over Vancouver Island, British Columbia on 26 October 1914. Mr Napier Denison saw it at noon from the Gonzales Hill observatory. It headed for Trial Island, then turned back towards the straits. The machine, at the time, was thought to have come from Port Townsend where US military manoeuvres were taking place.

Lieutenant Bequer recounted that:

'I had been there three days waiting at my station on Vancouver Island for the threatened raid. When the machine finally turned up and I went out to meet it, we clashed only about 30 miles from Vancouver. They got me in the leg. That interfered to some extent with my manipulation of the controls, but we kept at it. When the bullet hit my abdomen, however, I reckoned I was beaten. Yes, I ran, as fast as my machine would go. Where the other machine went I don't know.' (1)

On sober reflection it does seem highly unlikely that someone would fly the vast distance from Long Island to Vancouver to tackle these aerial spies. Such a flight would easily have drawn attention to itself, and it would have required several refuelling stops along the route. So much for a secret mission!

Most likely the story was spun to impress the locals, although if he was trying to prove how brave and tough he was, why didn't he say he beat the enemy flier despite his injuries?

Another possibility is that he was covering up secret shipments of aircraft from Buffalo to Toronto when the US was still neutral. (The US declared war on Germany on 6 April 1917.) An aircraft factory and flying school for Curtiss JN-3 aircraft - nicknamed 'Jennies' - was set up in Buffalo to supply the war effort in Europe, and there were other local air bases as well.

If there is any grain of truth in this story then this aerial dogfight over Canadian and US territory constitutes one of the most bizarre episodes in World War One.

What is quite striking to me is that most of the elements of modern ufological belief pré-existed in cases like this. Here the aerial dogfight with a UFO was anticipated decades before they became a regular feature of SF films and UFO reports. (2)

References

1. *Free Press*, 19 May 1915. Credit: Mr X
2. This and other cases of this type are examined in *The Scareship Mystery* by Nigel Watson.

LETTER

I hesitated to respond to Chris Allan's letter (*MMS*, July) in which he contends the three multiple independent witness cases I offered up as among my favourites in the class of those making the ETH an hypothesis worthy of respect and consideration - not proof of the ETH, Chris, but so strongly suggestive of the involvement of nonhuman intelligence to make the ETH a legitimate contender.

My hesitation arose from two considerations. First is my reluctance to get drawn further into the time-wasting game of 'best cases'. That's easily taken care of: I won't play after this. The second is Allan's transparent bias and appeals to authority, surprising and unworthy of my usually careful colleague.

Allan invokes Donald Menzel and Gordon Thayer of the Condon Committee to refute the Rapid City, South Dakota, case. Menzel was the 'sceptical' equivalent of Linda Moulton Howe, never meeting a UFO sighting he liked, including his own, for which he offered a scientifically impossible explanation. His tortured and ever changing 'explanations' for UFO cases are notorious and laughable to most on both sides of the UFO issue. Even the US Air Force found his notions ludicrous, flat didn't trust him, and did its level best to keep him at very long arm's length. As for Thayer, his report on the

case is so loaded with qualifiers, assumptions, if-thens, etc., that it hardly qualifies as respectable, let alone definitive. That Allan relies on Menzel and Thayer tells us more about his bias than it does about the case in question.

I will concede Allan's important point that the Vermillion case was never investigated. However, given the principal witness, I found it impressive and in the near future intend to pursue the best investigation I can possibly mount a half-century after the fact. As for his objections that the witnesses were not independent because they conferred at the time and that the Rev. Vermillion was reluctant to call what he saw a flying saucer - Taking the latter first, as Allan well knows, it really doesn't matter what a witness chooses to call or not call what he sees. Moreover, the truth is, Vermillion simply said he didn't really know what he saw, except that it was a very strange machine of some kind, with amazing performance characteristics well beyond anything 1950-vintage earthly. As for the second, do witnesses have to be totally isolated from each other to be considered independent? I think not. In this case, two groups of people, strangers to each other, saw the same thing at the same time, talked about it a bit, and then went their separate ways. I'd call that just as independent as the witnesses in the Rapid City and RB-47 cases, if not more so.

As for the RB-47 case, to say in effect that since I, Allan, prefer to suspend judgment on it, it doesn't count is - how to put it politely? - remarkable. However, it does suggest that Sparks's findings on the case have shaken my colleague's sceptical resolve. Perhaps there's hope yet. Chris, I suggest you (and everyone else genuinely interested in objective consideration of the evidence) read Sparks's paper very closely. I defy anyone who considers his results with an open and informed mind to come to any other conclusion than that what was encountered was the product of nonhuman intelligence.

Allan says one and a half of my three cases belong in the IFO box. Well, in American baseball terms, that means I'm batting .500, a damn' good baseball average - and in most other endeavours, a result that gets taken seriously.

Karl T. Pflock, Placitas, New Mexico

WORLD WAR ONE UFOS? Nigel Watson

Throughout World War One there were persistent fears of aerial attacks from the enemy. In 1914 there were sightings and rumours of German aircraft secretly visiting South Africa. Britain, Canada and the US suffered the most from these types of rumours and stories. In Britain, for reasons of security, most of the reports never surfaced in the newspapers but the War Office took a great interest in any sightings. Meticulous records were kept of sightings reported to the police or military, and further investigations were carried out in more detail. No real proof emerged but the authorities remained vigilant until the end of hostilities.

Civilians and many sectors of the military were frightened of aerial attack but the danger was grossly exaggerated, but such fears did bring home the fact that war could be waged anywhere, not just on the battlefields of Europe.

It should be remembered that Germany dominated the air with its Zeppelin airships which had a long range but were vulnerable to high winds and made an easy target. Germany also had plenty of aeroplanes but they had a short range and could not carry many weapons.

The major aircraft scares that sprang up throughout the world between 1909 and 1918 are surveyed in The Scareship Mystery which is being released by Domra Publications in October 1999. The book includes chapters by Granville Oldroyd, David Clarke, Eddie Bullard, Robert Bartholemew, Mr X and Nigel Watson.

MAGONIA Monthly Supplement. Letters and short articles welcome. Letters will be considered for publication unless otherwise indicated. Please send all contributions to the Editor: John Harney, 27 Enid Wood House, High Street, Bracknell, Berkshire RG12 1LN UK ☎/Fax: 01344 482709 Email: harney@harneyj.freemove.co.uk

=====